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SIX BERLIN INCIDENTS, 1961-1964

(A Case Study in the Management of U.S. Policy
Regarding a Critical National Security Problem)

by

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PREFACE

During the Kennedy administration, the 1958-64 Berlin crisis erupted into a series of incidents. Although they were not all of the same intensity, each presented the United States with a challenge. Partly because of the nature of the challenge and partly because of the Kennedy style, these incidents brought about major changes in the management of the Berlin problem.

I propose to examine six incidents related to Berlin which occurred during the Kennedy-Johnson administration. The first lasted from the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in June, 1961 through the tank confrontation at Checkpoint Charlie in October and included the erection of the "wall" on August 13. During the second, the Soviets tried to interfere with allied aircraft flying to Berlin in February and March, 1962. In August, 1962 the murder of Peter Fechter by an East German guard at the wall precipitated the third incident, which led to rioting in west Berlin, a dispute over the use of armored personnel carriers by the Soviets in west Berlin, and the abolition of the Soviet Kommandatura in east Berlin. The fourth took place in the Caribbean in October, 1962, when Khrushchev sought to improve his bargaining position by sneaking missiles into Cuba. The Cuban missile crisis was followed by a year long lull, which was ended in October and November, 1963, when the Soviets detained American

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convoys traveling to or from Berlin. Finally, in June, 1964, the Soviets symbolically terminated the 1958 crisis by concluding a treaty with east Germany.

As you will see, each of these episodes not only presented U.S. and allied officials with completely different opening scenarios, they also caught Allied planning in various stages of completeness (or incompleteness). Even though each found the Allied team better equipped and in better training than its predecessor, each was followed by adjustments in organizational and communications arrangements.

This record will be essentially a memoir, based primarily on my recollections of the three years from mid-1961 to mid-1964. Since I was at that time either a member of the staff or Deputy Director of the Berlin Task Force, my point of view will be that gained from the seventh floor of the State Department. This will be supplemented, however, by my observations on a half dozen trips to Europe, either alone, in the company of military officers, or with Secretary Rusk.

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AFTERMATH OF VIENNA MEETING

The Facts:

The events following the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna in June, 1961 are so well known as to require only the sketchiest outline.

Khrushchev used the occasion to throw down the gauntlet again on Berlin, renewing his 1958 demand that the Allies get out of the city and formally accept the division of Germany. Kennedy came away from the encounter in a sober mood, declaring that it was going to be a long, cold winter. Having established the basis for a personal dialogue with Khrushchev, he returned to Washington to continue developing the other half of the equation. This was the evidence of growing U.S. power, which would be used only when and if necessary.

A period of increasing tension followed. Both the Soviet Union and the United States announced an increase in military expenditures. As fears mounted that the escape hatch would be closed, hordes of east Germans fled to west Berlin. Khrushchev, meanwhile, thumped the war drums louder and louder. On July 25, President Kennedy informed the world that the United States would under no condition abandon west Berlin. As tension and the flood of refugees continued to mount, the world waited apprehensively, not quite sure what would happen.

The answer came early one Sunday morning, when Berliners awoke to find their city cut in two by soldiers and barbed wire.

The initial Western reaction was cautious and limited to protests. When the west Berliners made it clear that they were not satisfied,

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Kennedy sent Vice-President Johnson and a battle group to Berlin as tokens of American determination. He subsequently also asked General Lucius Clay to return to the city as his special representative.

Although these moves reassured the west Berliners of Western determination to defend them, the question of Allied rights in east Berlin remained up in the air. After a period of moves and counter-moves, in October there was a confrontation between American and Soviet tanks at Checkpoint Charlie, the sole Allied crossing point into east Berlin. The net result was that only American personnel in uniform continued to travel into east Berlin without showing any identification to east German police.

The Management:

The United States and its Allies entered the 1961 Berlin crisis with a minimum of management tools - planning, organization, and communications.

During 1959, following Khrushchev's "ultimatum," the U.S., U.K. and French Foreign Ministers approved a remarkable planning directive, which would be hard to improve upon today. This provided for plans to safeguard access to Berlin particularly by autobahn and air. Basically, it established the various categories of planning to be undertaken and assigned responsibility for the development of plans to the various headquarters and planning groups. By 1961, most of the plans involving the use of force had been completed. These included plans for varying sized probes on the autobahn in case of blockage of Allied access. They also included plans for appropriate action in the air corridors to protect Allied aircraft. Other than

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continuing to perfect airlift plans, however, little was done to plan for Allied responses not requiring the use of force. In addition, while there was a plethora of plans for the defense of west Berlin, there were no specific plans to deal with the possible division of the city.

On the recommendation of General Lauris Norstad, the three Foreign Ministers approved the formation of an integrated, tripartite staff (LIVE OAK) in Paris to prepare military plans related to access to Berlin. They also directed the U.K. and French Ambassadors in Washington and the Assistant Secretary for European Affairs of the State Department to meet as required, to provide over-all coordination of instructions to the field. The Foreign Ministers also assigned planning functions to the three Allied Embassies in Bonn, in coordination with LIVE OAK and the Commandants in Berlin.

Within the U.S. Government, planning was done by an informal working group, consisting primarily of State and Defense Department representatives. This group reviewed plans prepared in Europe, in coordination with representatives of the French and British Embassies.

These various organizations and groups depended entirely on national - U.S., British and French - communications systems. Although the U.S. military communications were adequate, State Department communications to Europe, including Bonn and Berlin, were inadequate. A telegram sent from Berlin to the Department by the most expeditious means took from four to six hours. There were furthermore no secure telephone facilities between Washington, Bonn and Berlin.

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Although I have described these management tools as minimal, the situation was not as bad as this implies. It was saved by the fact that by mid-1961, the Berlin problem had attracted a group of very capable Allied officers. It would take too much space to list them all here. I should, however, like to mention in particular Assistant Secretary Foy Kohler and Director of German Affairs Martin Hillenbrand, both of whom in 1961 were devoting their full-time energies to Berlin. At the American Embassy in Bonn, the late Francis Williamson had the primary responsibility for Berlin. In Berlin itself, Allan Lightner, an old German hand, headed an able group of Foreign Service officers, who manned the ramparts. Finally, in Paris, General Lauris Norstad took a direct and personal interest in the defense of Berlin, aided by the tripartite staff headed by British Major General George Baker.

After President Kennedy returned from Vienna, Washington plunged into an intensive "policy review," which culminated in the President's July 25 policy declaration on Berlin. This phase was perhaps the most difficult one we faced. The President and his staff, impatient with and not entirely understanding State Department processes, clamored for answers to half formulated questions. State and Defense, uncomfortable in a double harness, struggled to meet the demands placed upon them by the White House. Within State, a struggle went on as to who below the Secretary was going to "control" U.S. policy on the Berlin problem.

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Finally, President Kennedy called in Dean Acheson to advise him and Secretary Rusk on Berlin. Although there were a number of papers produced in the summer of 1961, the Acheson papers were by far the most influential, if only because of the personal authority he exercised.

Despite the disorder, an Interdepartmental Coordinating Group managed to throw together two voluminous studies which became the basis for Presidential decisions. Policy, however, finally took the form of the President's July 25 speech and a brief policy paper prepared for the Allies, which indicated what the U.S. planned to do and what was expected of them.

During this period, the idea of forming a Berlin Task Force kept cropping up. The White House favored this. Officials in Defense did also. Many State Department officials were opposed, however, on the grounds that in such a group State would "lose control of the problem." (This assumed that they were in control of it, when in fact no one was on a full-time basis.) Finally, however, Secretary Rusk agreed with Secretary McNamara in early August to establish a task force. A nucleus of this group was assembled shortly before Assistant Secretaries Kohler and Nitze went to Paris for a Foreign Ministers' meeting. Shortly after this conference broke up and the delegation returned to Washington, the Soviets divided Berlin. Foy Kohler called a meeting and shortly after August 13 the first full meeting of what became known as the Berlin Task Force was held.

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For the next year or so, this group became the primary locus for coordination of policy within the U.S. government. The three key persons were Foy Kohler, who was chairman or Director, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze and Major General David Gray, representing the JCS. Other government departments, such as USIA, CIA, and Treasury, were also represented, but they had more specialized roles.

This is the way the task force usually worked, with the entire process not infrequently compressed into a single day. When a problem presented itself, a team consisting of officers from the agencies directly concerned - normally State, Defense and the Joint Staff - would prepare a staff study. This would be reviewed and either amended or approved in a meeting of the full task force. It would then be sent, often simultaneously, to the White House, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara and the Joint Chiefs. If the decision required approval by the President, McGeorge Bundy would arrange a meeting with the President. This meeting would normally be attended by Secretary Rusk, assisted by Ambassador-at-Large Charles Bohlen, Foy Kohler, and Martin Hillenbrand; Secretary McNamara, assisted by Paul Nitze; General Lemnitzer; McGeorge Bundy; and the President's Special Military Adviser, General Maxwell Taylor. Although this group invariably submitted any recommendations to extremely critical examination, the task force enjoyed a very high batting average.

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Following the departure of Henry Owen as State Department

liaison officer, McGeorge Bundy asked Foy Kohler to nominate a liaison officer for European problems. Kohler selected David Klein, a Foreign Service officer on detail to the task force who had served in Moscow, Berlin and Bonn. Although friction was by no means eliminated, he deserves a great deal of credit for absorbing what he could and improving working relations between Pennsylvania Avenue and Foggy Bottom.

Management in the field posed quite different problems. In the first place, there was an honest difference of views over whether the problem should be managed in Berlin, in Washington, or somewhere in between.

Both the soldiers and the civilians in Berlin have chafed for many years under what they consider attempts by Bonn, Paris and Washington to control their tactics. President Kennedy made it clear, however, early in the piece that he intended to oversee not only U.S. strategy but tactics. He felt that the stakes involved required that he do the bidding and play the hand. In addition, there was no one in the field in mid-1961 in whom he yet had sufficient confidence to delegate authority to manage the Berlin problem.

The appointment of General Lucius Clay as the President's Special Representative shortly after the wall only exacerbated the management problem. Whatever President Kennedy's reasons for acquiescing in Willy Brandt's request to send Clay to Berlin, they

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clearly did not include an intention to abdicate the responsibilities he had assumed for managing the Berlin crisis. When, therefore, Clay began pressing for the use of more militant tactics, the White House sent word to Foggy Bottom to tighten the reins. Since neither Kennedy nor Clay could admit publicly that their concepts of tactics differed, the State Department inevitably became the goat.

Clay also soon ran up against the military chain of command. Clay had no command authority in Berlin. Major General Watson, the Commandant, received orders in his military capacity from General Norstad in Paris; technically through USAREUR in Heidelberg but actually often directly. General Norstad, who had a vested interest in Berlin, objected strongly to Clay's giving instructions to Watson. His objections on technical grounds were compounded by the fact that he believed Clay's tactics unnecessarily risky.

While General Clay was fencing with the Soviets in Berlin, the Allied team in Washington plunged into a whirlwind of planning. Having been caught off base on August 13, it was determined to examine every conceivable contingency. In order to cope with the work load, the Ambassadorial Group - with the Germans added - established a number of sub-groups. A military sub-group chaired by Paul Nitze reviewed and expanded the previous air access planning. This expanded planning provided in particular for the action to be taken in case the civilian crews refused to fly. The military sub-group also prepared and pushed through the North Atlantic Council a directive to NATO military authorities, calling for preparation of NATO military

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plans which went beyond existing tripartite plans. A political sub-group, chaired initially by Martin Hillenbrand, began preparation of a comprehensive catalogue of possible contingencies regarding access and within Berlin, along with an indication of possible reactions. An east German sub-group, chaired by Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Richard H. Davis, prepared a paper related to a possible east German uprising. An economic sub-group, chaired by Under Secretary of the Treasury Henry Fowler, prepared plans for the use of economic counter-measures in certain circumstances.

While the tempo of activity increased in Washington and Paris, this was not so true in Bonn and Berlin. This was partly because Washington suddenly became very active and was slow to involve the field. In addition, however, the Americans in Bonn and Berlin, who had worked closely with the British and French over the years, were pessimistic about getting the British to support a firm line on Berlin. This overlooked, however, the fact that Washington was often little more inclined to be adventuresome than London.

EVALUATION:

Although the U.S. and its Allies went into the 1961 crisis with a minimum of planning and organization, they managed to limit the damage done by the Wall. This was mainly due to the quality of the improvisation of the Allied team, for which neither planning nor organization is a substitute.

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The most sluggish performance was related to the division of Berlin on August 13. Even assuming that the decision not to use force to challenge the "wall" was correct, and I think it was, the U.S. and its Allies were slow to recognize the impact of this event, particularly in West Berlin. There were several reasons for this failure. First, the Allies for several years had thought of and planned for a Berlin crisis primarily in terms of a threat to access. Thus although some Berlin experts had recognized for years that the Soviets might one day divide the city, there were no plans for this contingency. In addition, many high officials were preoccupied in early August with the possibility of an east German uprising. They saw east Germany as a pressure cooker, with west Berlin as a safety valve. They were concerned that, if it were closed, there might be an explosion. This concern led them to want to go easy on August 13, lest a more vigorous Allied response lead to unwarranted expectations in East Germany.

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AIR CORRIDOR EXERCISE

The Facts:

Whatever one thinks of the Allied reaction to the "wall," it obviously did not discourage Khrushchev from pressing his demands. After a note exchange during the fall of 1961, the Soviets launched during February and March, 1962 a cautious but determined effort to disrupt Allied air access to Berlin. They sought at first to reserve two corridors for several hours for use by Soviet military aircraft for maneuvers. They then tried to reserve certain altitudes in corridors for use by Soviet aircraft. They also "demanded" some changes in flight procedure, such as a requirement that Allied flight plans specify the time aircraft would cross the east-west German border. Finally, they directly harassed Allied flights, particularly by buzzing some with Soviet fighters.

The Allies responded in a determined but cautious way. They concentrated on keeping the civil airlines flying at as close to their normal schedules as possible. They flew some military and civilian aircraft at critical altitudes. They declined to alter their procedure under pressure. Also, they placed fighter aircraft on ground alert.

Although these measures preserved Allied rights to fly the corridors at times of their choosing, they did not bring sufficient pressure on the Soviets to cause them to cease their harassing tactics. General Clay recommended that the U.S. show its determination by flying fighters in the corridors and by flying military aircraft over ten thousand feet. The Allies maintained that they have these rights,

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but they have not exercised them for years, mainly because of a lack of a military requirement but partly because of Soviet threats. Although the Allies had agreed before the Soviet campaign began to use fighters under certain circumstances, these did not arise. Both General Norstad and governments rejected General Clay's recommendation that fighters be used as a demonstration. General Norstad did recommend that he be given authority to fly over 10,000 feet but elected not to use the authority after it was given to him.

The Soviets finally ceased their campaign only after the Allied response convinced them that they would have to run undue risks in order to force Allied aircraft to cease flying. In addition, Secretary Rusk and British Foreign Secretary Home upbraided Gromyko in Geneva for trying to carry on a discussion while kicking them on the shins in Germany.

The Management:

The Allies went into the air corridor exercise much better prepared than they had been on August 13. In the first place, they had done extensive planning over a period of years directed toward preserving air access. As a matter of fact, the final instruction to General Norstad was dispatched by the Ambassadorial Group only weeks before the Soviet campaign began. Secondly, the Allied team was much better organized. This is not to say, however, that the planning or the organization were perfect.

Although the planning had been pretty thorough, it had concentrated on possible Soviet moves requiring a response involving

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use of force. This military orientation was reinforced when the Defense Department took the lead within the U.S. government in 1961 on air access planning and the new quadripartite planning directives were prepared in the Military sub-group of the Ambassadorial Group. Thus, although this review was done primarily by civilians, it concentrated upon the military aspects, building upon the planning done by LIVE OAK.

Ironically, the April 1959 Foreign Ministers' basic directive on Berlin planning anticipated Soviet moves not involving use of force. They allocated this planning to the Embassies in Bonn. Although the Embassies began such planning, it was never completed, primarily for want of detailed guidance from the Foreign Offices.

This military orientation of planning had at least one important result for the management of the air exercise. When the Soviet campaign began, the American Embassy in Bonn and General Clay in Berlin began sending in recommendations which largely ignored the previous Allied planning. The State Department promptly called to their attention the fact that considerable discretion on air access matters had been delegated to General Norstad. The Department directed Bonn and Berlin therefore to coordinate with their British and French colleagues and to send their recommendations to Paris.

Thus, the day to day management of flights in the corridors fell to the LIVE OAK staff, under the immediate supervision of General Norstad. Without exception, his approach - which was based on

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matching but never raising Soviet bets - was supported by governments. As a matter of fact, President Kennedy subsequently commended General Norstad's careful handling of this episode.

While General Norstad and his LIVE OAK staff managed the flights in the corridors, the Ambassadorial Group monitored their activities and concentrated on the diplomatic aspects of the Soviet campaign. This covered two aspects, the legality of the Soviet flights in the corridors and the Soviet demands for changes in procedure.

The State Department early in the game sent to the field and gave to the Allies a legal opinion that the Soviet flights were within the framework of the post-war agreements. Some people interpreted this to mean that the U.S. government did not object to the Soviet flights. Unfortunately, this led to considerable confusion, one of the results of which was that the three Allies did not jointly protest the Soviet flights at the government level until very late in the game. This protest, when finally sent, took the common sense position that these flights were a threat to the safety of Allied aircraft and should cease.

The Ambassadorial Group referred the question of the Soviet request for changes in procedure to the quadripartite group in Bonn for study. While agreement was reached on an analysis of the Soviet demands, no agreement was reached on how to respond to them, and the Soviets stopped pushing them without receiving a definite tripartite reply.

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The critical element, however, during this period was probably the desire of the U.S. and UK governments not to allow the Soviet campaign to disrupt the dialogue on Berlin. This led to an effort to minimize publicly the nature and significance of the Soviet campaign. This policy almost went off the track when the Soviets dropped some chaff in the corridors shortly before Secretary Rusk left for Geneva. He considered cancelling his trip but was dissuaded. In the event, this was probably just as well, because his and Lord Home's intervention with Gromyko was apparently partially responsible for the Soviet decision to end their campaign.

EVALUATION:

Although the Allied performance regarding the air corridors was far from perfect, it was an improvement over their response to the "wall." In addition, they emerged from this experience far better organized than they went in. Although General Norstad and his staff were considered the "heroes" in Washington, the Quadripartite Group in Bonn worked together much better than previously. In addition, the Ambassadorial Group resisted the temptation to try to manage the day to day tactics from Washington. The only place the Allies did not work closely together was Berlin, where General Clay steadfastly refused to be shackled by "the lowest common denominator."

The most important operational lesson learned from this exercise related to communications. LIVE OAK found that it was severely hampered by poor quadripartite communications, particularly to Bonn and Berlin. This led in due course to the creation of an excellent quadripartite communications system, which tied together the three Commandants in

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Berlin, the Quadripartite Group in Bonn, LIVE OAK and major subordinate field commanders.

The exercise also demonstrated the value of secure telephonic communications between State and the field, for the Berlin Task Force regularly used the secure telephone to Bonn and Berlin, which had been installed after the "wall." This means of communication became even more important during the second wall episode in the fall of 1962, during which it was decided to manage the tactics from Washington.

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1962 WALL INCIDENTS.

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The Facts:

During the summer of 1962, tension began to mount again regarding Berlin. There was a marked increase in incidents along the wall. Khrushchev resumed his threatening tone. The Soviets on June 7, protested the "Fascist" behavior of West Berlin policemen. The Allies countered two weeks later with a proposal for quadripartite talks in Berlin directed toward ending violence along the wall.

On July 2, the U.S. announced the withdrawal of some of the troops it had sent to Europe during the summer of 1961. A week later, Khrushchev called for the withdrawal of Allied troops from Berlin and their replacement by UN-supervised troops from the smaller NATO and Warsaw Pact countries.

Smelling smoke, the Allied Berlin team began practicing its fire drill.

The smoldering fire began to throw off sparks on August 13, the first anniversary of the "wall," when a West Berlin crowd rioted at the wall. It burst into flames a few days later when - as had been long feared - an east German refugee named Peter Fechter was wounded by east German guards and was allowed to bleed to death on the east Berlin side of the wall. Tension mounted in west Berlin, and West Berliners - frustrated and angry - rioted for three nights. After a period of uncertainty as to whom to blame, they began stoning Soviet vehicles in West Berlin.

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After a short period of hesitation, the Soviets reacted. On August 21, they began bringing their war memorial guards into West Berlin in armored personnel carriers. The following day, they announced the abolition of the Soviet Kommandatura in East Berlin.

Since there was nothing the Allies could do to prevent the Soviets from abolishing the Kommandatura, they limited their reaction to a statement that this step would not affect Allied rights in Berlin. They then quietly acquiesced in the Soviet action, by using alternate means of dealing with the Soviets concerning east Berlin.

The Soviet armored personnel carriers presented a greater challenge. The Allies first told the Soviets on September 2, that they should use a crossing point nearer the Soviet memorial than Checkpoint Charlie. Then, about two weeks later, the Allies told the Soviets to stop using the armored cars altogether. The Soviets acquiesced in both demands.

In retrospect, it appears clear that they did this because they had bigger fish frying elsewhere. On September 11, three days before the Soviets abandoned the use of armored personnel carriers, TASS issued a statement that the Kremlin would wait until after the American elections to resume the dialogue on Berlin.

The U.S., however, continued to gird for battle over Berlin. During October, the Administration posted more and more storm warnings. This led Congress to issue a resolution regarding American intentions to remain in Berlin. Shortly thereafter, Presidential Assistant McGeorge Bundy stated publicly that, if necessary, the U.S. would "go it alone" on Berlin.

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With attention thus focused on Berlin, few people seemed to notice that the TASS statement on Berlin came at the end of a policy declaration on Cuba! Only in retrospect was it clear that this presaged a Soviet effort to transfer the contest to the Caribbean.

The Management:

Within the U.S. government, the second wall crisis was run from Washington. President Kennedy took a close personal interest and made the critical decisions. For example, the key decisions related to the Soviet use of armored personnel carriers were made in meetings at the White House. Kennedy was at first inclined to take a tolerant view of the personnel carriers and so informed one of his press conferences. Secretary Rusk was inclined toward this view also. Practically everyone else on the U.S. Berlin team, however, felt that it could not be tolerated. They gradually wore the President down, and he went reluctantly along.

The day to day and hour to hour tactics were managed by a group of Berlin Task Force officers from the State Department Operations Center. They were unenthusiastic about this role - preferring to leave the tactics to U.S. authorities in Berlin - but were forced into it by the desire of the President and Secretary Rusk to call the shots. In view of the slowness of telegraphic communications to Berlin, these officers had to rely primarily on the secure telephone to convey in advance the contents of instructions.

While one could disagree with the effort of the President to manage details from Washington, one cannot complain that he procrastinated or slowed down the decision making process significantly.

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Both the Secretary and President were very accessible and acted quickly on recommendations. For example, Berlin, early one morning, requested urgently by secure telephone reconsideration of an instruction sent them the night before. I drafted a reply. Acting Secretary Ball took my hand written draft immediately to the White House, where it was approved by the President - after he added a sentence. I telephoned the text of the instruction to Berlin, within an hour of their telephone call.

Allied coordination took place primarily in Berlin, where the Commandants worked extremely well together.

The Ambassadorial Group in Washington prepared, obtained approval by governments, and issued a statement about the abolition of the Soviet Kommandatura within twenty-four hours, a great improvement over its performance at the time of the "wall."

The U.S. and Allied reactions were largely improvised, since it would have been difficult to foresee the Soviet use of armored personnel carriers, and the abolition of the Soviet Kommandatura was unanticipated. The Allies had for years had elaborate plans to deal with communist-inspired riots in West Berlin. The West Berlin authorities were reluctant to use these plans to suppress the riots, and Allied authorities apparently failed to understand the unfavorable impression these riots were creating outside Berlin - and particularly in Washington. This deficiency was corrected when Secretary Rusk called Charles Hulick, Acting head of the U.S. Mission, by secure telephone to urge him to see that action was taken to stop the riots.

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EVALUATION:

The second wall crisis found the Allied team very well prepared. It was anticipating trouble, even though it took an unanticipated form. The Allied Commandants in Berlin deserve the major credit for the coordination of the Allied effort.

Although the lack of detailed planning slowed down the Allied reactions to the Soviet use of armored personnel carriers, this factor probably did not alter the ultimate outcome, which was apparently determined by Khrushchev's desire to avoid a confrontation in Berlin at a time when he had set the wheels in motion to move the game to the western hemisphere.

The second wall crisis demonstrated anew to the Allied Berlin team the importance of rapid, secure tele-communications. In addition to the requirement for a network linking Bonn, Berlin and Paris, it was found that the political staffs in Berlin were severely hampered by lack of effective communications. Located in separate parts of Berlin, they spent an undue amount of time traveling to and from meetings. This was corrected subsequently by establishing secure teletype communications between the British, French and U.S. political offices.

The requirement for effective communications was to be demonstrated even more dramatically during the Cuban crisis.

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CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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The Facts:

In August 1961, the policy level of the U.S. government was bracing itself for a Soviet challenge to Allied access to Berlin or for an uprising in East Germany. Instead, the Soviets divided Berlin. During the summer and fall of 1962, the U.S. government was battenning down the hatches for a storm over Berlin. Instead, the Soviet main thrust was to try to sneak some missiles into Cuba. These weapons may, however, have not been as unrelated to Berlin as their distance would seem to appear. Khrushchev had promised to resume the dialogue over Berlin after the American elections. It was probably no coincidence that at that time he expected the missiles in Cuba to be operational.

The Management:

When President Kennedy and his advisers decided to counter this Soviet move with a naval blockade of Cuba, the thought occurred immediately that the Soviets might counter with a blockade of Berlin. Key members of the Berlin Task Force were, therefore, called into the White House or State Department the weekend before President Kennedy made his speech, which was on a Monday. Since there was little that could be added to planning for Berlin at that point, they were drawn into the complex of activities related to Cuba.

The President's Executive Committee of the National Security Council, which was called into being to deal with the missile crisis, established a sub-committee on NATO and Berlin, chaired by Paul Nitze. In addition

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to producing some papers initiated by ISA, with which State representatives were not very happy, it served to keep those people working on Berlin informed of what was happening in Cuba.

The only operational problem concerning Berlin which arose during that critical October week was removed from the agenda promptly. A dispute arose between Soviet checkpoint personnel and a U.S. military commander over procedures for processing his convoy. Although it was resolved without a lengthy detention, the U.S. Mission in Berlin recommended that we take advantage of the Soviet preoccupation with Cuba to precipitate a showdown on the procedure issue, which had been looming for about a year. The difficulty with this suggestion was that the leaders of the U.S. were also somewhat preoccupied with Cuba, and the last thing they wanted was a crisis in Berlin. After checking with my colleagues in Defense and on the Joint Staff and getting Martin Hillenbrand's approval, I called Berlin on a secure telephone and advised them to avoid if possible difficulties on the autobahn.

Although the formal charter of the quadripartite Ambassadorial Group does not extend beyond Berlin and Germany, it was found convenient to utilize it to brief the British, French, and German Embassies on Cuba. Paul Nitze called a meeting of the Military sub-group to receive an account of the intelligence on Soviet activity in Cuba and hear President Kennedy's speech. Other than the fact that the State Department Operation Center's antiquated T.V. set did not produce a picture, only sound, this was a useful exercise. The Ambassadorial Group subsequently met several times to be briefed by its Chairman, Ambassador-at-Large

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Llewellyn Thompson, who was playing an important role in White House discussions.

EVALUATION:

The most important implication of the Cuban crisis for the management of the Berlin problem was the effect of placing the Strategic Air Command and other strategic forces on a high state of alert. Confronted with the certainty of destruction if they made a mis-step, the Kremlin behaved extremely cautiously. This had been predicted by the military members of the Berlin Task Force (particularly Col. Chauncey Meacham), and their view seemed to be borne out by the war-peace games we had played on Berlin. There was no way, however, to be sure what the effect on the chess game would be until the queen was actually advanced. After Cuba, SAC if possible played an even larger role in our thinking on Berlin and gave us some assurance that the Soviets would thereafter try to keep any crisis below the level at which the U.S. would place its strategic forces on a high state of alert.

The Cuban crisis also laid bare some of the deficiencies in the U.S. government's and particularly the State Department's communications. These had long been known, but Cuba brought them forcibly to the attention of the President and Secretary Rusk. As a result of a "crash" program to correct these deficiencies, the State Department greatly improved its communications capabilities to Europe, including with Bonn and Berlin. In addition, Secretary Rusk obtained the agreement of his British, French and German colleagues to the creation of a quadripartite teletype conference facility, for use by the Foreign Ministers in event of another Berlin

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crisis. This facility became operational in the spring of 1964.

These preparations were based on the assumption that Cuba had by no means eliminated the possibility of another crisis over Berlin.

This was proved correct one year after Cuba, when the postponed dispute over convoy procedures erupted.

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CONVOY INCIDENTS

The Facts:

During October and November, 1963 the dispute over convoy procedures that had been going on for several years came to a head.

Although there have been disagreements over procedures for processing Allied convoys since the war, the 1963 crisis had its origins in the battle group sent to Berlin in August, 1961. In order to speed up processing, the commanding officer, Col. Glover Johns, ordered his men to dismount to be counted by Soviet personnel. The Soviets took advantage of this by insisting that subsequent convoys dismount. When the U.S. authorities in Berlin learned of this practice some months later, they tried to stop it - but too late.

Out of this situation a running dispute arose over which size convoys would dismount and which would be counted in the trucks. The situation was complicated by the fact that U.S. and British procedures differed. (The French transported their troops by train.) Attempts were made to agree on standard procedures but without success. When, therefore, the Soviets detained a U.S. convoy on October 10, 1963, there was not only a dispute between the U.S. and Soviets over procedures but the U.S. and British were not agreed either.

The October 10 incident was preceded the day before by a dispute over dismounting, which was resolved without a detention. When the Soviets refused to clear a Berlin bound convoy at the western end of the

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autobahn on October 10, U.S. authorities in Berlin were ready for trouble and promptly recommended implementation of the rules of conduct. The key to these was that, after having been detained - as it turned out - for about fifteen hours, the autobahn operations officer, when instructed, was to inform the Soviet officer in charge that, if the convoy were not processed within a specific time, the convoy would proceed without processing. This information was also to be passed to the Soviet headquarters at Wundsdorf through the U.S. Military Liaison Mission at Potsdam.

Just before the time limit expired, the Soviets processed the convoy and it proceeded toward Berlin, only to be detained by the Soviets at that end. This time the Soviets allowed the time limit set by the convoy commander expire. When the convoy attempted to proceed, their way was blocked by Soviet troops in armored personnel carriers. The U.S. Commandant in Berlin, Major General James Polk, thereupon halted an outbound convoy of troops at the checkpoint, to bring counter-pressure to bear.

The U.S. protested strongly and repeatedly both in Germany and at the government level. President Kennedy raised the question with Gromyko, who happened to be in Washington, on October 10. Secretary Rusk protested to Ambassador Dobrynin on October 11, while Ambassador Kohler was talking to Zorin in Moscow. Fifty-two hours after the original detention the Soviets finally released the convoy without the U.S. troops dismounting.

A British convoy was subsequently halted on October 16 but was allowed to proceed after nine hours.

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These detentions had a number of results. First, the three Allies agreed upon harmonized procedures regarding dismounting. Second, they transmitted these agreed procedures to the Soviets. Third, they sent a U.S. convoy on November 4, to test Soviet intentions.

The Soviets detained this inbound convoy at the western end of the autobahn for 41 hours. When the convoy attempted to move forward the first day of the detention, the Soviets again deployed troops in armored personnel carriers to block it.

In addition to protesting, the Allies took two steps. On the second day of the detention, the British and French sent convoys identical to the U.S. convoy from Berlin. Second, General Lemnitzer ordered the assembly of a tripartite probe force near the western end of the autobahn.

After a brief period of hesitation, the Soviets processed the British and French convoys without their dismounting. Before these convoys reached the western end of the autobahn, they released the U.S. convoy detained there.

The Soviets subsequently replied to the Allied communications concerning procedures, by setting forth theirs. Although they were not the same as the Allied, they were compatible.

The U.S. sent one more test convoy about the middle of November, but it went through without incident.

It was thus that east and west reached a "negotiated" agreement on procedures for dismounting by Allied convoys. The procedures were

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essentially the same as the U.S. had followed prior to the detentions. The differences were that the British in substance adopted U.S. procedures, the Allied informed the Soviets what the procedures were, and the Soviets did not explicitly disagree with them.

THE MANAGEMENT:

Since the October 10 convoy detention found me in Berlin, I had an opportunity to observe the management of the crisis in Berlin, Paris, and Washington. I spent the first day observing the Berlin end of the operation, the second day at LIVE OAK in Paris, and I returned to Washington in time for the detention of the British convoy on October 16.

As soon as word was received that a U.S. convoy was having difficulty on October 10, the key military and civilian staff gathered in the Berlin Emergency Operations Center, under the chairmanship of General Polk's Chief of Staff, Col. Thomas Foot. By the time General Polk arrived from a meeting with the British and French Commandants, the teleconference facility with Heidelberg had been opened. General Polk began pressing within a short time for authority to set a time limit, at the end of which the convoy would proceed.

Before he got this authority, Heidelberg had opened its teleconference facility with Paris, and Paris in turn was in contact with Washington. When the White House learned of the proposal to set a "time limit" (the term used in messages from the field was "ultimatum"), the White House attempted to get it delayed until the President had discussed the detention with Gromyko.

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As a result, orders were issued to Berlin to withhold setting a time limit. These arrived in time to halt the wheels at the checkpoint but the military liaison mission officer was already on his way to Potsdam, and General Polk could not contact him because he did not have a radio in his vehicle.

When I arrived in Paris, I found LIVE OAK monitoring the detention but not playing any active role, since they considered it a U.S. show. The point of control was the Operations Center at EUCOM, several miles away from the LIVE OAK headquarters. The LIVE OAK staff did discuss the desirability of assembling the tripartite company-size problem force but did not recommend this.

LIVE OAK, however, subsequently played a key role in working out the "harmonized" Allied procedures. Using the recommendations of the three Commandants in Berlin and the comments of the Embassies in Bonn and British, French, and U.S. military headquarters, General Lemnitzer submitted to governments his recommendations regarding procedures. He recommended, however, against giving them to the Soviets.

At this point, the Contingency Coordinating Sub-group of the Ambassadorial Group took over and coordinated governmental agreement on the procedures.

The U.S. started out with a division between the political and military sides on two questions. The Joint Staff, as is their habit,

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backed General Lemnitzer's recommendation against notifying the Soviets. It also opposed a British proposal to agree on a procedure regarding lowering tailgates. Defense (ISA) sided with State on these points, and we were able to overcome the resistance of the Joint Staff.

We had received informal word from the White House some time before that McGeorge Bundy favored harmonization of procedures. Before going to the President, therefore, we worked out a preliminary quadripartite position for reference to governments.

This led to a meeting with President Kennedy. Under Secretary George Ball represented Secretary Rusk, assisted by Assistant Secretary Tyler, Richard Davis, and me. Secretary McNamara represented Defense; General Taylor, JCS; and John McCone, CIA. McGeorge Bundy also attended. Each of the principals went into the meeting with briefing papers which supported the agreement reached in the quadripartite group.

Under Secretary Ball lead off by reading the key elements of our briefing memorandum. President Kennedy opposed the recommendations, on the grounds that they would involve a change in procedures. He also wanted to inform the Soviets at the governmental level, rather than in Germany - as the French insisted. I am not sure why he always seemed to begin by opposing the solution brought to him but suppose that he wanted to force its advocates to defend it. In any event, in this case, support soon melted. I hoped that McGeorge Bundy would come to the rescue, but for some reason he did not.

Just as I had resigned myself to a defeat, the President looked

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across the table at me and said, "You've been working on this job for some time. What do you think"? I made a brief argument for harmonization. While this did not sweep the field, the meeting broke up without a definite decision. During the following days, the position gradually moved to support of the quadripartite proposal. This was cinched when Ambassador Thompson returned to Washington and supported it. As a result, first McGeorge Bundy and then President Kennedy - if with some reluctance - approved an Ambassadorial Group instruction to the field regarding convoy procedures.

The next step was to get out an instruction regarding the next "non-dismount" convoy. A team of officers from State, Defense, and the Joint Staff prepared a draft instruction to the field about the convoy, specifying in some detail its composition. With minor amendments, the President approved the instruction and authorized General Lemnitzer to determine when the convoy would go.

When the convoy went, on Monday, November 4, we were braced for trouble. At about 4:00 a.m., it was clear that the convoy had been detained. By the time Ambassador Thompson and the Secretary arrived at the office, we had gathered the Berlin Task Force team.

In the middle of the morning, Secretary Rusk, Ambassador Thompson, and I went to the White House. President Kennedy opened the discussion by saying that it was clear now that there was no misunderstanding and that there was a test over who would determine the procedures. After

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some discussion, he said that if the convoy were not released in several hours, he would approve setting a time limit.

After I returned to the Operations Center, the task force group discussed what we would do if the Soviets again stopped the convoy by deploying troops in armored personnel carriers. The consensus was that at that point it would be necessary to make the operation tripartite. Two possibilities were discussed, sending identical British and French convoys and using one of the smaller tripartite probe forces.

When the Soviets prevented the convoy from proceeding, Ambassador Thompson and I went to see the Secretary. It was about six o'clock. We recommended that we ask the British and French to send convoys and request General Lemnitzer to assemble the company-size tripartite probe force. Rusk called Secretary McNamara, who approved, and McGeorge Bundy, who undertook to get presidential approval.

I called a quadripartite meeting for 8:00 p.m. and asked the British and French representatives to convey to their governments the request that they send identical convoys the following day from Berlin. We also instructed Berlin to ask the British and French Commandants to make plans for convoys, pending receipt of instructions - which they did. The JCS sent an instruction to General Lemnitzer, recommending that he assemble the tripartite probe force.

At the same time as this was taking place, there was rising pressure within the government for some sort of non-military counter-measures, which President Kennedy endorsed in principle. As a result, a meeting took place at the White House in the afternoon on the second day of the detention. Various possible counter-measures were discussed but no consensus developed. The President was reluctant to use the strongest

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one available, which was to cancel the wheat deal. Before any decision was taken, a report was received - which later proved incomplete - that the Soviets had released the convoy. The meeting broke up in some confusion.

The Soviets did, however, release the convoy some hours later, after a disagreement over whether the convoy would be processed before or after the Soviet troops were removed. The Soviets finally folded, and the convoy went on its way, without the troops dismounting to be counted and without tailgates being lowered - the Soviet fallback demand.

EVALUATION:

The convoy incidents brought out several aspects of problem management.

The Allied Berlin team had seen the crisis approaching for eighteen months. It had prepared specific plans for dealing with a detention. It had, however, been unable to agree on measures which might have avoided the crisis, such as an Allied agreement on procedures which might have been conveyed to the Soviets.

The existence of plans to deal with a detention undoubtedly facilitated the management of the crisis. In Washington, London, Paris, Bonn, and Berlin officials were able to work from a single document approved by governments. This document did not provide all the answers, but it provided a point of departure for improvisation. The field made the suggestions, and Washington coordinated the conclusions. The government whose convoy was involved provided leadership.

The critical aspect of the plans, however, which raised the most

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serious problem was the "time limit." The plans formally delegated to the Commandants in Berlin authority to set a time limit, at the end of which the convoy would attempt to proceed, even if it had not been processed. This delegation of authority was approved by governments, including President Kennedy, in mid-1962. When, a year later, the Soviets detained a convoy, the President and other high ranking officials had forgotten the delegation of authority. In addition, the convoy detention occurred in unanticipated circumstances. Gromyko was at the very time in Washington and calling on President Kennedy. The net result was an attempt to postpone setting a "time limit" at the last moment. This failed, simply because a U.S. officer on his way to Potsdam did not have a radio in his vehicle. As a result of this experience, the President withdrew the authority to set a time limit on future convoys.

Although by the time of the convoy incidents the Allied organization was established and experienced, it had become a bit rusty. This resulted largely from some changes in personnel during the year since the Cuban crisis. It also took a while for the organization to adjust to the channels required by the specific situation. The pertinent lines of authority evolved, however, during the first convoy detention. The wrinkles were smoothed out during the "harmonization" of Allied procedures. By the time of the second U.S. convoy detention, the Allied team was operating in high gear.

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SOVIET-GDR TREATY

The phase of the Berlin problem which began in 1958 reached its denouement on June 16, 1964, with the signature of a treaty of friendship and mutual assistance between the Soviet Union and the East German regime. This treaty stated that West Berlin was "an independent political unit," but reaffirmed the Potsdam Agreement (and hence Allied rights in Berlin).

Having been warned two days in advance by the Soviets, the Ambassadorial Group, on behalf of governments, instructed their Ambassadors in Moscow to reserve Allied rights before the treaty was actually signed. The communique issued that same day after Chancellor Erhard's talk with President Johnson also warned the Soviets "would be solely responsible for the consequences of any attempt at interference with Allied rights that might result from implementation of the new treaty." Two weeks later, the Allies issued a statement, worked out by the Ambassadorial Group, in which they reaffirmed their goal of German unity. They also stated that, contrary to the treaty, West Berlin was not "an independent political unit" and that it had "close ties" with the Federal Republic.

Thus did the artificial crisis created by Khrushchev in 1958 end six years later with something short of a bang.

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CONCLUSIONS

During the period 1961-64, the management of the Berlin problem improved steadily. Using the planning done prior to 1961 as a point of departure, the Allies elaborated plans for almost every conceivable contingency. They also delegated a certain amount of authority to the field to make preparations for the execution of plans and - in the case of the U.S. and UK - to execute some of these plans. The quadripartite organizations in Berlin, Bonn, Paris and Washington significantly improved their operational capabilities, even though they remained a cumbersome apparatus. This improvement was facilitated by the creation of a quadripartite communications network, as well as the improvement of national communications.

I should not like, however, to seek to leave the impression that West Berlin owes its freedom today to the way in which the contest with the Kremlin was managed. It does not. The Soviets only backed away when - after a series of probes - they became convinced that they were confronted by determined adversaries. Management did, however, play a role.

As the narrative above makes clear the management of the Berlin crisis was by no means all peaches and cream. Mistakes were made, and progress was at times uneven. From this experience, I believe that some tentative conclusions can be drawn with regard to the management of critical foreign policy problems.

1. Planning - After my Berlin experience, I do not see how anyone can seriously question the value of contingency planning. While

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the Berlin plans did not eliminate the need for judgment and improvisation - as General Norstad often stressed, you can plan "for" a contingency but not "on" it - they did provide an agreed point of departure. They also provided the planners, who in most cases were also the action officers, an opportunity to become acquainted. This enabled them to acquire a common vocabulary, which facilitated exchanging views in a critical situation. In addition, planning often lead to the creation of resources, particularly military, which otherwise could not have been made available quickly enough.

Planning for Berlin also suffered from several disabilities. I believe the most serious was that it became so complex that only a few individuals fully understood it. Even though we briefed President Kennedy and Secretary Rusk on the general scope of the planning and they approved critical elements of the plans, when a specific problem arose our first act was to reacquaint the policy level of the government with the quadripartite plans. With the regular turn-over of personnel at the staff level, some element of the organization would occasionally "forget" the plans, which would produce temporary confusion.

In brief, while planning is essential to good management, the plans should be kept as simple as possible.

2. Delegation of authority - Although I supported in 1961 and 1962 further delegation of authority to the field, my fuller experience with this has led me to revise my views. Given the stakes in Berlin, the President will inevitably want to call the shots in any critical

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situation when it comes to his attention. To pretend otherwise only introduces an unnecessary element of confusion, such as occurred with the "time limit" in the October, 1963 U.S. convoy incident. Military commanders also have a tendency to sit on authority once they have it. It then becomes more difficult to obtain agreement to instruct them to take a given action, because of the reluctance of the Joint Chiefs to tell their field commanders how to play cards they already have in their hand.

In brief, governments should delegate full authority to the field to make preparations to execute agreed Berlin plans, but they should probably reserve the power to authorize execution of any plans involving use of force.

J. Organization - All members of the team should be acquainted with the general role of the various organizations, as well as their limitations. There should, however, be no attempt to freeze relationships, since each incident can bring a different combination of organizational elements into play.

The greatest problem, however, is to maintain continuity. Between incidents, there is a tendency to return to "normal" and divert personnel to other tasks. Unless this is resisted, much experience can be lost. This means - as we did in 1961 - dealing with a crisis and getting acquainted at the same time. It is particularly important to maintain the State/Defense/JCS team. It is also extremely important to keep the quadripartite machinery from rusting, which can be accomplished between incidents by doing a certain amount of planning.

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This risks making the plans too complicated, but the risk is manageable because of the reluctance of governments to make decisions when not under pressure.

In brief, organizational arrangements should be simple and flexible. In addition, although the intensity of the effort can vary, the machinery should be kept turning over at all times.

4. Communications - Fast, reliable communications - both telegraphic and telephonic - are essential to good management. Some in the field may regret the increased ability good communications give headquarters to manage tactics, but improved communications are the product of a desire to control, not the other way around.

These conclusions are based on my experience during the 1961-64 Berlin crisis. I suspect, however, that they could be applied with some validity to other critical foreign policy problems.

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This paper was based primarily on my own recollections. I used Facts of File to refresh my memory of the published facts. The paper has been reviewed in various stages of draft by a number of officials involved with the Berlin problem. These have included U.S. officials in Washington (State, Defense, and the White House), Bonn, Berlin, and Paris. There is as yet no adequate unclassified study of the Berlin crisis.